

YOGURT'S ROLE IN A FLEXITARIAN DIET



A flexitarian diet contains both plant-based foods (fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts, and seeds) and animal-based products (low fat or nonfat dairy, lean meats, poultry, seafood, and eggs) in a balanced approach. Switching to a flexitarian diet may help one manage certain health concerns and may provide more sustainable dietary options.¹

1 YOGURT SCORES HIGH AS A NUTRIENT-DENSE SNACK

- ✔ In a study comparing popular snack foods by their overall nutrient profiles, yogurt was found to have the highest nutrient-density score, but was the least consumed among the snack foods evaluated.² This study utilized a nutrient-density measurement tool known as the Nutrient Rich Foods (NRF) Index 10.3.
- ✔ Lowfat and nonfat yogurts are good choices to help achieve daily nutrient requirements and can be an important source of high-quality protein and calcium as well as phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, iodine, zinc, and vitamins, such as vitamins A, D, B12, and riboflavin (B2).³



2 YOGURT CAN BE AN EXCELLENT SOURCE OF COMPLETE PROTEIN

- ✔ Dairy products, such as nonfat and lowfat yogurt, are well established as providing a source of complete protein.⁴
- ✔ The dairy protein found in yogurt is well digested and absorbed, and its mix of amino acids, including all nine essential amino acids, supports efficient protein synthesis.⁵

3 THE NUTRIENTS IN YOGURT SUPPORT MUSCLE AND BONE HEALTH⁶

- ✔ Calcium, vitamin D, and protein together help promote muscle and bone health.
- ✔ Calcium plays a major role in bone health and muscle contractility and vitamin D is required for calcium to be properly absorbed by the body.^{7,8}

4 YOGURT AS PART OF A HEALTHY DIETARY PATTERN MAY PLAY A ROLE IN WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

- ✔ An epidemiological study compared consumption of different foods, including yogurt, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains among more than 120,000 U.S. women and men and showed that consumption of these foods was associated with less weight gain over time, with yogurt showing the best results.⁹
- ✔ Other forms of dairy, including low fat or nonfat milk, had no measurable association with less weight gain.

5 EATING YOGURT REGULARLY, AT LEAST 2 CUPS (3 SERVINGS) PER WEEK, MAY REDUCE THE RISK OF TYPE 2 DIABETES ACCORDING TO LIMITED SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE¹⁰

- ✔ Diabetes is one of the top 10 causes of death in the U.S., impacting more than 37 million Americans with 1.2 million new cases diagnosed every year.^{11,12} The overwhelming majority of these cases are type 2 diabetes, the risk for which can often be managed with lifestyle changes such as being more active and eating nutrient-rich foods.^{13,14}
- ✔ FDA reviewed the available evidence on yogurt consumption and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and concluded that this research suggests that people who eat yogurt regularly may have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who do not.

6 CONSUMING YOGURT AS PART OF A BALANCED DIET MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH HEART HEALTH¹⁵

- ✔ In a recent observational study, yogurt consumption was associated with healthy levels of systolic blood pressure and circulating glucose within the normal range.¹⁵
- ✔ Consuming yogurt as part of a balanced diet may help maintain metabolic well-being.

7 YOGURT MAY BE AN OPTION FOR LACTOSE INTOLERANCE

- Yogurt is, for many consumers, a more easily digestible alternative to milk because, on average, it contains less lactose than milk.¹⁶
- Also, yogurt's live and active cultures continue to have activity in the intestinal tract and may allow lactose intolerant individuals to enjoy the nutritional benefits of dairy products with fewer associated symptoms.¹⁷

8 YOGURT CAN CONTAIN LIVE AND ACTIVE CULTURES

- Fermented foods like yogurt that contain live bacteria, probiotics, or prebiotics can help nourish, enrich and protect the gut microbiota, which plays a central role in our overall health.
- Cultures and fermentation can increase the nutrient content (e.g., B-vitamins) and digestibility of foods.¹⁸

9 INCLUDING YOGURT IN A CHILD'S DIET MAY HELP IMPROVE DIET QUALITY

- Including nutrient-dense yogurt in a child's diet may help improve diet quality and prevent excess weight gain. A recent analysis of national health and nutrition data found that introducing one 6-oz. serving of vitamin D-fortified yogurt each day to children's snack times would help children increase dietary intake of calcium, vitamin D, and potassium without adding empty calories.¹⁹
- Combining yogurt with fruit or vegetables (e.g., as a dip or smoothie) can also increase consumption of other nutrient dense foods and dietary fiber intake.²⁰
- A study recently found that higher yogurt consumption was associated with lower measures of adiposity in U.S. children (ages 8–18), such as lower BMI-for-age, lower waist circumference, and smaller subscapular skinfold.²¹



10 DAIRY HAS A LOWER CARBON FOOTPRINT THAN OTHER ANIMAL-BASED PROTEINS, SUCH AS BEEF AND PORK²²

- Nonfat and low fat dairy, including yogurt, play a role in a flexitarian eating pattern. Not only is dairy a nutrient-rich food, it also has a lower carbon footprint than other animal-based proteins, such as beef and pork.²²
- The high quality and highly digestible proteins in dairy products play a key role in nutrition, especially when reducing meat consumption.⁵



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1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2019). Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse gas fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems. [online] Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/srcc1/> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2019]. 2. Hess J, Rao G, Slavin J. The Nutrient Density of Snacks: A Comparison of Nutrient Profiles of Popular Snack Foods Using the Nutrient-Rich Foods Index. *Glob Pediatr Health*. 2017;4:2333794X17698525. 3. Ridoutt BG, Baird D, Hendrie GA. The role of dairy foods in lower greenhouse gas emission and higher diet quality dietary patterns. *European Journal of Nutrition* 2021;60:27585. 4. Mitchell CJ et al. Understanding the sensitivity of muscle protein synthesis to dairy protein in middle-aged men. *Int Dairy J*. 2016;63:35–41. 5. Dietary protein quality evaluation in human nutrition. FAO Food and Nutrition Paper No. 92. 2013. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/ag/humannutrition/35978-02317b979a686a57aa4593304ffc17f06.pdf> [Accessed 2 May 2019]. 6. Rizzoli R. Dairy products, yogurts, and bone health. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2014;99(5):1256S–1262S. 7. Gropper SAS, Smith JL. Advanced Nutrition and Human Metabolism. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013. 8. Institute of Medicine. Dietary reference intakes for calcium and vitamin D. Washington DC: National Academies Press. 2011. 9. Mozaffarian D, Hao T, Rimm EB, Willett WC, Hu FB. Changes in diet and lifestyle and long-term weight gain in women and men. *N Engl J Med*. 2011;364:2392–2404. 10. Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. “Qualified Health Claim for Yogurt and Reduced Risk of Type 2 Diabetes.” U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://www.fda.gov/food/cfsan-constituent-updates/fda-announces-qualified-health-claim-yogurt-and-reduced-risk-type-2-diabetes>. 11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Diabetes Statistics Report. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/data/statistics-report/index.html>. [Accessed 30 October 2023]. 12. American Diabetes Association. Statistics About Diabetes. [online] Available at: <https://diabetes.org/about-diabetes/statistics/about-diabetes>. [Accessed 30 October 2023]. 13. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Type 2 Diabetes. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/basics/type2.html>. [Accessed 30 October 2023]. 14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. On Your Way to Preventing Type 2 Diabetes. [online] Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevent-type-2/guide-prevent-type2-diabetes.html>. [Accessed 30 October 2023]. 15. Wang H, Livingston K, Fox CS, Meigs JB, Jacques PF. Yogurt consumption is associated with better diet quality and metabolic profile in American men and women. *Nutr Res*. 2013;33:18–26. 16. Webb D, Donovan SM, Meydani SN. The role of yogurt in improving the quality of the American diet and meeting dietary guidelines. *Nutr Rev*. 2014; 72(3):180–189. 17. Lomer MC, Parkes GC, Sanderson JD. Review article: lactose intolerance in clinical practice—myths and realities. *Aliment Pharmacol Ther*. 2008;27:93–103. 18. Patel A, Nihir S, Prajapati JB. Biosynthesis of vitamins and enzymes in fermented foods by lactic acid bacteria and related genera—A promising approach. *Croat J Food Sci Technol*. 2013;5(2):85–91. 19. Hess J, Slavin J. Snacking for a cause: nutritional insufficiencies and excesses of U.S. children, a critical review of food consumption patterns and macronutrient and micronutrient intake of U.S. children. *Nutrients*. 2014;6(11):4750–4759. 20. O'Neil CE et al. The role of breakfast in health: definition and criteria for a quality breakfast. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2014;14(12):s8–s26. 21. Keast DR, Hill Gallant KM, Albertson AM, Guggler CK, Holschuh NM. Associations between yogurt, dairy, calcium, and vitamin D intake and obesity among U.S. children aged 8–18 years: NHANES, 2005–2008. *Nutrients*. 2015;7(3):1577–1593. 22. Eshel G, Shepon A, Makov T, Milo R. Environmental costs of animal-based categories. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. 2014;111(33):11996–12001. [online] Available at: <https://www.pnas.org/content/111/33/11996> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

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